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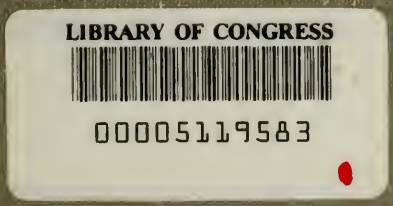

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VERMONT

VERMONT

BY

WENDELL PHILLIPS STAFFORD, LITT. D.

MIDDLEBURY VERMONT
1910

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READ AT THE
ONE HUNDRED AND TENTH COMMENCEMENT OF
MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

DEAR LITTLE STATE among the dark green hills,
Who for thy never-changing bounds didst take
The long, bright river and the azure lake,
And whose deep lap the short-lived summer fills
With sudden sweetness till its wealth o'erspills,—
How shall we sing thee for thy beauty's sake,
Or praise thee in a voice that shall not break
For pathos of the theme wherewith it thrills?

VERMONT

What if on flying feet thy summers go,
And the strict gods of beauty and of power
Poured in a casket small thy peerless dower?
Who would not rather feel love's fiercest throe
Than count the vacant years the loveless know—
Reign with the rose her one imperial hour
Than live the summer-long a meaner flower?
Be glad: thy crown is greener for the snow.

VERMONT

Thou sit'st with loins upgirt, like those that wait,
Not those that slumber; and around thy knees
True sons of thine, scorners of fear and ease,
Make music of their toil, early and late;
For thou art fitly compassed in thy state
By fields of clover, reddening to the breeze,
Hummed over by the blithe and laboring bees
And guarded by the mountains calm and great.

VERMONT

Swarm after swarm thy children have gone forth
But still the old hive keeps its golden store,
Filled by the same bright service as before
With frugal bounty and unwasted worth;
And still they fly, far west and south and north;
Their murmur fills the land from shore to shore;
And if but few return, what myriads more
Dream of thy face and bless thee for their birth!

They dream of thee! Of them dost thou not dream?
Didst thou not show them in their happy prime
Thy deep-wood secrets—teach them in their time
The lapsing legend of the lingering stream—
Awe with the shadow, lure them with the gleam—
And at the first touch of the autumn rime
Weave them the glamor of a magic clime,
And paint their palace with the rainbow's beam?

And they are still thy children, though their feet
Follow hard trails in the tumultuous town,
Or to the mighty waters have gone down;
And though they long have heard the surges beat
On alien shores, and alien tongues repeat
Their names, and of new men have earned renown,
They are thy children still, and every crown
They win is thine, and makes thy dream more sweet.

At times thy musings take a darker hue,
And thou hast sight of some war-furrowed field
Where once the smoking squadrons charged and
wheeled,
When Liberty her perilled trumpet blew,—
And down through all the vales thy heroes flew,
With thy old deathless valor fired and steeled,
To make the glorious legend on thy shield,
"Freedom and Unity", forever true.

Sometimes with its old scorn thy lip is curled—
Thinking how on thy borders, east and west
And south and north, thy foes around thee pressed,
And all their bolts upon thy head were hurled—
When thy young flag was suddenly unfurled
And thy lone eagle left his stormy nest,
Soaring above grim Mansfield's darkening crest,
And screamed defiance to the whole armed world!

Yet these are not thy symbols. Scorn and ire
In thy deep soul are but a passing mood.
But thou dost watch with sweet solicitude
The plowfields putting on their green attire,
The blue smoke curling from the cottage fire,
The little schoolhouse, many-scarred and rude,
Half-shrinking in the shadow of the wood,
And, ringed with loving elms, the tall white spire.

Nor wilt thou turn away from hours like these
In the still closes of the cloistered town,
Where generations of the book and gown
Lead their pure lives under the tranquil trees.
Such pensive ways thy sober spirit please,
And thou dost muse in many a volume brown
From far-off, golden ages drifted down—
Old inspirations, raptures, reveries.

VERMONT

Mother of Men! whom the green hills enthrone,
From whose bright feet the rivers haste away,
Thou of the ages art—we of a day,
Yet we have loved thee and thy love have known.
And if with too faint breath our reeds are blown
To carry the great burden of thy lay—
Yet some true notes among our measures play—
The shame will all be ours, the honor thine alone.

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